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The Duty of the Church IN THE Conflict BETWEEN Capital and Labor

BY

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THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH IN THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CAPITAL AND LABOR.

"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?"—LUKE xii. 13, 14.

IT was the claim of the Kirk of Scotland in the days of her greatest purity that she had the right "to treat in an ecclesiastical way of greatest and smallest affairs, from the king's throne, that should be established in righteousness, to the merchant's balance, that should be used in faithfulness." It was not the idea of those great and true Christians that this world was to be given up to the dominion of Satan in the hope of saving men in the next. The Kirk of their time was as prompt to deal with

social as with doctrinal questions, and there can be no doubt that the steady pressure of its discipline did much to give a purer and noble direction to the national life, and to purge it from prevailing sins. There was a time when it seemed as if a narrower view of the Church's duty seemed likely to prevail throughout our Protestant Christendom, but of late the churches of both the old country and the United States have been brought to return to something like the ground taken by the Church of the Covenanters, and to recognize that the Church has its work to do in Christianizing our social and public relations, as well as in fitting the saints for glory.

The conflict between labor and capital is one of the social difficulties to which the Christian Church cannot afford to be indifferent, and our own Church least of all. We are largely represented on both sides of the struggle. There is no other Christian Church in America whose membership owns so much of the wealth of the country; there is none, I think, whose membership in this city has profited more largely by the growth of our manufactures in the last quarter of a century. At the same time, we are very largely represented among the wage-

earners, and honorably represented. In my contact with manufacturers and other employers of labor I hear of the excellence and trustworthiness of our Presbyterian workmen, and especially of those who have come hither from Ulster. It is our brethren who are engaged in a struggle which is accompanied by outbursts of evil passion which must tend to the loosening of social ties, the deterioration of character and the weakening of the gospel's influence in the hearts of men.

Two centuries ago, and less, there was no conflict between capital and labor. Industry was still organized in the mediæval fashion, in the three degrees of master, journeyman and apprentice. It required only a small capital to become an employer of labor, and every apprentice looked forward to occupying the highest place on the scale of industry as a reward of a reasonable degree of diligence and thrift. The major part, probably, did rise to become masters themselves; so that the system furnished a perfect outlet for social ambitions and an ample reward in social consideration for the exercise of the virtues of a man's calling. It was a broad ladder with room at the top for every one

who chose to make the moderate exertion required for the ascent.

With the substitution of steam for other forms of power all this was changed. The small workshop with half a dozen journeymen and apprentices was replaced by the large factory requiring a vast capital to start it and a small army of workmen to operate it. Instead of masters who lived face to face with their men, there came firms or corporations who dealt with them only through agents and foremen. The material gain to society was very great, and for a time it diverted attention from the drawbacks which accompanied the change. Commodities were produced much more cheaply and abundantly than had been possible before, and in this material gain the workman shared even more than any other class. The prices of the necessaries of life in general fell; his wages rose. He received not only an increasing amount, but a larger share, of the joint-earnings of labor and capital; while his employer received a larger amount, but a diminishing share. The workman was enabled to enjoy many comforts which had been accessible only to the wealthiest classes, and not always to them.

But no man lives by bread alone, and social consideration is one of the elements of a satisfied existence. The rise of the factory system has had the effect of drawing a much firmer and more distinct line between the capitalist and the wage-earning class. It is true that there is no legal obstacle to the modern workingman's becoming himself an employer; it also is true that the economic obstacles to his becoming an employer are not so great but that a workingman of exceptional ability and a faculty for accumulation may surmount them and get to the top of the ladder; but it is true that that career is no longer open to the whole body of workmen, as it once was. The number of employers is necessarily much smaller now, so that far fewer places are open to competition. The amount of economy and of enterprise required to secure the place is great beyond the capacity of all but a few; where ten went to the top in old times, not so much as one may do so now. This has become a fruitful source of discontent. Workmen see great fortunes accumulated by a limited class, and they begin in many instances to think that an unfair division has been made of the joint-earnings of capital and

labor, although that division never was so favorable to them as it is to-day. They see a smaller class living in ease and comfort, while they often feel the pinch of hard times, and they begin to think that if the world was not made for the rich, our present social order was so.

Still more unfortunate has been the effect of that separation of employers from the employed which has become characteristic of many industries. We have come to be served by people who are behind stone walls to us. Especially is this true of the great joint-stock companies, who direct their operations through agents, and keep these in place, not because they are on good terms with the workmen, but because they earn large dividends for the company. To them and their agents the workmen are "hands" only, and the distinction is very keenly felt. Our old Scandinavian and Teutonic forefathers, if they wished to inflict a deadly insult on an enemy, put up a placard by the wayside on which he was said to be a "nithing"—a "nothing." Such an insult could be wiped out only in blood. Now, the modern workman begins to think that his way in life is lined with such placards. It

is less so in America than in some other countries. "At home I was only a puddler; here I am a man," was the remark of an English workman who had found a home in Pennsylvania. In America, Church, State and School treat the workman as a human being—an end in himself, not merely as a means to some other end. But in our industrial life there has been a growing tendency to regard him only as a tool which society uses to serve its needs. And it is the industrial life which takes the most of his time and his energy: election-days and Sundays are much the lesser half of the year; and a man must be either much above or much below the ordinary level of humanity if he is contented to spend the bulk of his time in thankless service which is taken from him as it might be from a steam-drill or a turning-lathe, without any recognition of his personality. In the old industrial order this difficulty was not felt, because the master lived and worked face to face with his men; and whenever men so work, they generally manage to get to a common understanding and some kind of human relations. We know from the accounts of contemporaries that there was room for a great deal

of brutality toward apprentices and of ill-usage even of journeymen under the old methods, but the social grievance was not felt as now.

It was in the atmosphere of disaffection produced by these changes that the working classes approached the question of wages. How should the joint-earnings of capital and labor be divided between the two? They found that the new masters, through the greater unification of industrial control, possessed a power to determine what wages should be, such as the old ones never had. And in many, if not most, cases the masters were unwise enough to use this power to depress wages, although this in the long run was sure to prove to their own disadvantage. They made use of the competition of the laborers for employment to secure workmen at the lowest rates the labor market knew of. Against this the only defence for the workmen was to refuse to compete, and to come to a common understanding as to what should be the lowest wages they would accept. This is the substance of trades' unionism—the refusal to compete.

There is nothing in the principle which is open to condemnation on either ethical or economic

grounds. It has the sanction of the example of employers, as when they seek to retrieve a falling market by limiting production and fixing a minimum price, and this often to the advantage of the community at large. The refusal to compete on the part of the workingmen, however, was regarded for a long time as something which must not be endured. The trades' unions were outlawed by the courts, and the common-law doctrine of conspiracy was invoked against them, as being "conspiracies in restraint of trade;" their treasurers were allowed to plunder them with impunity, and men were sent to prison on both sides of the Atlantic for the simple offence of striking for higher wages: as late as 1869 working masons were arrested for the offence in the State of New York. It was held that what it might be quite lawful for an individual to do was not lawful for an association; and this doctrine of the British courts was imported into America by our lawyers and judges. This outlawry lasted in Great Britain until the year 1867, when it came to an end with the investigation into the "Sheffield outrages." The outlawry of the unions had led to a long series of violent acts by

which the lives and the property of masters and of workmen who stood outside the unions had been sacrificed or endangered. The disclosure of these practices under a promise of amnesty led the British Parliament to retrace its steps. It gave up the business of outlawing the trades' unions as conspiracies, and declared that what was lawful for an individual to do to secure better remuneration for his labor should be lawful equally for associations of workingmen.* The result has been that the outrages came to an end at once and there has been no renewal of them. The temper of the working classes has been much improved by this recognition of their right to act unitedly for the benefit of their class. But thus far two only of our American commonwealths have had the good sense to follow the example set by the British Parliament, and I am glad to say that one of the two is Pennsylvania.

I have indicated in this account of the matter what I think is the duty of the State toward this conflict between the wage-earning and the wage-paying class: it is to hold an even balance between organ-

* Mr. Justin McCarthy's *History of our own Times*, chapter liv., contains an ample and careful account of the matter.

ized capital and organized labor—the force of money and the force of numbers—and to remove every provocation to lawlessness and outrage by taking care that the law shows neither favor nor disfavor to either party. It must allow neither to encroach upon the rights of the other or of the general public. It must protect the workingman who organizes for common action and the workman who refuses to join the organization. And it has the right to take ampler action for the protection of the general interests than it has yet done, as by forbidding strikes or dismissals without a month's notice in any employment whose suspension would directly injure the public. But it will be both blind and unjust if it try to stop the struggle by coercing either side into submission or by imposing conditions which will cripple either. It must recognize the legal right of every man to refuse to work for a rate of wages or for a number of hours or in company he thinks unsatisfactory, and his equal right to persuade others by peaceful means to do the same. And what the individual workman is free to do the association of workmen must be free to do also. If this principle had been recog-

nized from the first—if it were everywhere recognized now—the labor problem would be a much simpler one.

But it is a different matter to define the Church's duty in the premises. "To treat in an ecclesiastical way" such a problem as this is to treat it as representing Christ and his methods of social reform. I think his refusal to act "as a judge or a divider" in the case of the disputed inheritance is as apposite an instance of his method as any in the Gospels. No doubt there was a right and also a wrong side in this controversy between the two brothers; no doubt it was a part of Christ's work to abolish all such wrongs out of human society; no doubt the wrong in this particular case was not a matter of indifference to him; and yet he refuses to interfere in the dispute, declaring that to be a work to which he is not called. The reason of his refusal is found in the fact that he deals not with the branches of the world's evil, but with its roots: he is making the tree good that the fruit may be good also. He has no time for particular cases which might seem to call for his arbitration, because he is so busy with the extermination of the evil tempers of heart and

mind which make such cases possible. He shows this by his further utterance on this very occasion. He does not stop with the refusal; he proceeds: "Take heed, and beware of coveteousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And he adds the parable of the rich barn-builder who took the other view of life, and who at the end went out of this life to the other stripped and naked.

If the Church is to follow in the footsteps of her Master, she must look deeper than the surface of life in such a case: she must seek the cure of social evils in that spiritual regeneration which gives society truer ideals of life and what it consists in. We need this caution from our Lord's words all the more because in these days we are tempted to look for some more superficial remedy for the deep evils of society. We are inclined to ask by what new arrangement of our industrial system we can overcome the difficulty—what contrivance will meet our need. Great is the faith of the Anglo-Saxon race in contrivances! After fifty years' preaching from Mr. Carlyle that no moral results are obtainable from machinery, we still are on the

outlook for some mechanical device that shall solve our moral difficulties and enable us to dispense with a higher standard of duty and responsibility; so we talk of co-operation, of arbitration and of profit-sharing as though in any of these lay our social and industrial salvation. No doubt these all have their uses, and especially the last. It is very encouraging to see that employers of labor in our own city are resorting to this admirable corrective of many of the evils of the wages system, but they are expecting too much if they think that even profit-sharing will prove a cure-all. Its break-down in several notable instances shows that until the temper of wage-payers and of wage-earners is changed for the better even profit-sharing will not bear the strain of industrial antagonism, much less get rid of it.

Our true need is not a new method, but a new spirit. In saying so I have the support of some of the most eminent of American economists—notably of Colonel Carroll D. Wright, of the National Bureau of Statistics, and of Professor Richard T. Ely, of Johns Hopkins University. They hold that nothing but the diffusion of a more

Christian spirit in our business and industrial life will suffice to bring this great controversy to a peaceful and satisfactory conclusion. It is the evil spirit of strife and greed which Christ must cast out before there can be peace. This is the result for which his Church is called to work. She cannot afford to make herself the champion of either side; she must refuse to act as "judge or divider" in any such matter. She will be tempted by the attractions of wealth on the one side and by those of numbers on the other; she will be more subtly tempted by the appearance of injustice wrought by either to the other. She will fear the charge of being indifferent to great wrongs. But she cannot desist from her proper work to give heed to these, and that work is the preaching of "peace on earth, good-will to men." She must condemn any use of the power that wealth gives or of the power that numbers give which is not controlled by the spirit of Christlike charity. She must speak as the Master did when in the Sermon on the Mount he forbade the exercise of the right to defend person and property except in the spirit of the highest good-will.

And is there not a lesson for the Church in the Master's words of warning to this brother who had disputed the inheritance?—"Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." That was the sin he seemed to find most in the way of his own gracious work upon the hearts of men; that was the root of the pharisaism which had eaten out any true sense of what his Father was from the hearts of the people of Israel. They had come to measure life—or, as we would say, success in life—by abundance of possessions; and have not we in this age of busy accumulation come to much the same measurement? More and more we count the man a failure who has not made money; a success, if he have. A merchant may have saved his city from famine by his foresight, or given an impetus to some business by his personal energy, which has resulted in the employment of thousands where scores were given work before; but we ask about his bank-account when we measure his success. If that shows a deficit, however honorable to himself, we say, "He has failed." If he has made money, we think him successful, and say,

"He is worth" so much. These modes of speech betray the currency among us of just the false ideal of life which our Lord rebukes here. They are not the speech of the kingdom.

In the kingdom of God the money-making standard will not be the accepted one. When that kingdom comes in its power, the churl shall not be called honorable because of his money-bags. Then all professions will become "liberal," because all will acknowledge a higher standard of success than this. Yes, the day will come when men will be as much ashamed to keep a store or run a hotel merely for the sake of the money it brings them as they now would be to preach the gospel from any such base motive. Then men will measure their success by the spirit in which they have been able to do each day's proper work, and they will lay aside the burden of the anxieties which now make business and industrial life a weariness. Then it will no longer be said of us in that mistranslated text of Isaiah, "Thou hast multiplied the people, and not increased the joy." And the foul, strife-breeding spirit of greed will have vanished out of society, and each will rejoice to be

of service to his neighbor and to give what is just and right to him, whether it be in wages or in the work that earns wages; for the principle of *use* will have supplanted that of *gain* as an industrial motive.

If men lived more in this Christian spirit, they would love their work not less, but more, than they now do. It is charged upon Americans that they are too fond of business. The fault I would find with them is that they are too little fond of it —that they do not put honor enough upon it. If they did, they would have more joy in it, and would show that joy. Our forefathers adorned their workshops and lived in the same house with them. They organized their callings for religious worship, and on the day of its annual festival each trade went to church to thank God for his goodness. They searched the Bible for references to their trades, to show their antiquity and their honor. The gardeners pointed back to Adam; the tailors claimed God himself as the first in their business; the carpenters and shipbuilders alleged Noah; the metal-workers appealed to Tubal Cain; the masons spoke of Solomon and Hiram as

masters of their craft; while carpenters and fishermen dwelt lovingly on the fact that the Master's own hand had been on the plane and the oar. They loved the work for its own sake and for its uses to mankind. They could understand Dr. John Tauler when he told the craftsmen of Strasburg: "One can spin, another can make shoes; and these are gifts of the Holy Ghost. And if I were not a doctor of theology I would gladly be a shoemaker, and would try so to make shoes that men should see I did it for the love of God and the good of men."

Every honest calling is ordained of God for the good of men just as truly as is the ministry of the word. Any of them is profaned and desecrated by being treated merely as a means to gain. And of our use of that which God has given us, whatever it may be, we shall have to account to God when he asks after the use we have made of our talents. They are part of the order of his world—each a wheel in the great machine by which human life is sustained and served. And He who watches the sparrow light on the ground to get a bit of straw to build its nest or a crumb of bread to feed its

young has thought and time for the common every-day duties which fill up our lives, and sees how we are discharging them.

All this, and more, is involved in our Lord's teaching about the stewardship of earthly possessions. His instruction on this point is too narrowly understood in most cases, I think. It seems to be thought that if a man gives "as he has been prospered" to what we call "religious and benevolent objects," he has discharged his stewardship and may deal with the rest of his possessions as he pleases. But the doctrine of the New Testament is that all wealth is a trust for God, and that it all is to go to God's uses. One such use is the outlay a man makes on his own household, in providing for his own and in making his home pleasant and attractive to his children; another is his contribution to the expenses of the government and for all objects which appeal to public spirit; yet another is his outlay for the advancement of that particular calling or business in which God has been pleased to employ him for the welfare of his fellow-men. All these, if done in the right spirit, are uses of his money for God's service

just as truly as though it had gone to build churches. In this broader and truer view of what stewardship is it ceases to be a mere obligation and becomes a privilege—the privilege of making our whole lives a happy and contented service of God. It was by this principle that our Lord antagonized the covetous spirit in his own time, and it never was more needed than in our own times; for here lies the evil root of our industrial strife—a strife that would be impossible if our civilization were truly pervaded by this great Christian principle.

Among the sins which grow out of the covetous spirit is the regarding of our fellow-men as simply means to our ends, not as human beings—not as ends in themselves—and not as having the claim of brotherhood upon us. The duty of entering into right and human relations with every human being God brings into our lives, of playing the neighbor's part to each and every one, applies to all social intercourse and to every business transaction. It means the recognition of personality in one who has the same Head, even Christ. It means the "making a man more precious than gold," however humble the man. It means the

adoption of a right Christian attitude of mind toward the store-girl who sells us tape and the conductor who takes our fare, and it means the expression of this in a genuine Christian courtesy. It means that we set up no "Nithing" placards in any man's way in life. Whichever of us lives up to this ideal of social intercourse is helping to prevent in America the opening of the dangerous social rifts which in Europe divide class from class.

Do not say all this is too high an ideal for human living. It is not so; it is that which is coming, "for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." When we read the Sermon on the Mount in the light of what society was in those days, we see that Christ already has done greater things than these for the extermination of base and selfish impulses from society, and, having done so much already, shall we doubt that the day will come when that sermon will become the social principle of a truly Christian civilization? "And he shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!"

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